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# THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

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### FATE AND FREE WILL

NO subject has been more debated in philosophy, none by debate has been worn more threadbare, than free will. And, sad to say, without leading to any generally accepted conclusions, or removing certain painful doubts that weigh upon the minds even of the most cultivated and hamper or impede their actions. I was lately reminded of this in reading the wonderful panorama which Thomas Hardy unrolls in his epic play *The Dynasts*. He there introduces a chorus of spirits who comment wisely, or feelingly, or cynically, on the events of the Napoleonic history; the *Spirit of the Pities* representing human hopes and fears, the *Spirit of the Ages*, passionless insight, etc. I was charmed to find a great man of letters, the last of the older generation remaining to us, basing his criticism of life on a thoroughly modern and scientific philosophy. But I soon became aware of a flaw (as I must hold) in this philosophy—it was fatalistic; and, on probing further, the fatalism was found to be due to monism, to Mr. Hardy's acceptance of monism as not merely the prevailing fashion, but the last word of a scientific metaphysics. Napoleon, in the sequel, was held up to admiration as wiser than his fellows because he felt the inherent fatality of things, and regarded his lust of conquest and ruthless ambition and general bloodthirstiness as independent of his will and forced ineluctably upon him. In short, there was at the center of the universe an inscrutable power that pulled the strings, and to which our human thoughts and actions could only passively respond, and the strongest of men was also the wisest, if he saw this to be so. And for progress, for escape from the principles and passions of Napoleon, we can not trust to ourselves, but can only hope that the blind power that rules the world will eventually guide it into milder and more beneficent channels. Now this fatalistic philosophy seems to me, as I say, to be flawed; and it may not be useless to point out to those upon whom it imposes, and who suffer from it, wherein the flaw consists.

I am not going to assert that we feel the will to be free, and that therefore it must be so, and the conclusion that the world is entirely

governed by the law of cause and effect must be wrong. Doubtless there is some truth in this way of stating things—for human instinct rises superior to all sophistication—but it does not bear the truth upon its face. I am going to maintain that the world is governed by cause and effect, but that nevertheless we are free, in the sense in which Napoleon felt himself not free—free, and able, if we will, to realize the ends we have at heart. We are not playthings of a blind or cruel power upon whose pleasure we must wait, even though all our acts are caused—we are *nostræ fortunæ fabri*, and the fatalistic conclusion rests upon sheer fallacy and illusion.

What is it to be free? You can not be free unless you are free *from* something; what is it from which the will is free? It is free, first, from the necessity of deciding upon any one course of action, rather than its opposite, or than no action at all. It is free, antecedently, from the necessity of deciding at once, in advance of the most mature deliberation. In a word, we can choose, and take our time about it. We can weigh what it is we contemplate doing, and realize how our feelings and inclinations and previsions and deepest instincts bear upon it. We can make quite sure what we want before we speak the final word. So that, when the decision finally comes, it will be the expression of our innermost, our entire nature. Now this is what we originally and properly mean by our wills being free. And this is the only kind of freedom essential to morality. Moreover, it is an obvious and undeniable fact, a fact of experience; nobody can question that we are free in this sense. I propose to call this our *empirical* freedom.

You can not then say, in this sense, that we feel as if we were free, and therefore we probably are so. This is to introduce the other kind of freedom, the uncausedness of our decisions—*speculative* freedom, as I shall call it, because it could only be established by speculation—and make the feeling of freedom an argument for it. But the feeling of freedom is the feeling of our empirical freedom—it is the feeling of freedom in the sense in which freedom can not be denied without absurdity. Speculative freedom, on the other hand, is one theory of choice, the theory that it is uncaused, with another theory, the theory that it is caused, opposed to it. To argue from empirical to speculative freedom is thus to offer the *fact* of choice as a proof that one *theory* of choice rather than another is true. And if it be true, as I have suggested, that empirical freedom, which is undeniable, constitutes the real and sufficient foundation of morality—being that which makes it possible for us to be counseled, advised, warned, held responsible, and, in short, to conform or not to conform to the beneficent customs of society—then it is equally irrelevant and impertinent to urge the

necessities of morality as an argument in favor of speculative freedom. Speculative freedom is needed, it would appear, not for human morality but for divine—that the Being who made the universe may be justified in punishing us, his unfaithful creatures.

Empirical freedom, then, is consistent with universal causation. But it would lose its value if the causes of the will were conceived as depriving it of reality and efficacy—if, that is, we could say to ourselves with truth that the will is only an appearance, a puppet pulled by strings from the center of the universe or a wave swept passively forward by forces out of the past. The will is myself willing, the concrete state of the psyche at this moment as producing results that the psyche foresees and approves; and the question is, therefore, whether the psyche or self is a force, a reality, or whether, on the other hand, it is a mere shadow cast by the one reality and force of the universe. Now to this question it seems to me that a man's self-knowledge and self-respect should give the answer. Am I NOTHING? Shall I allow myself thus to be elbowed theoretically out of existence by the Absolute? When I say "reality" or "existence," what do I mean but precisely such being as I feel myself to possess; and how then can I *deny* my own existence or reality without abusing the words? In truth, the doctrine that a central unity of things is more real than the self rests on specious reasonings, or uses the word "real" in a new and strange sense. If in the proper sense I am real and you are real, and things outside us both are real, reality can only be plural. And will, which is the active aspect of some parts of reality, must have the genuine, though limited efficacy which belongs to it as a force among other forces. The "block universe" (by which I do not mean the universe as bound together by cause and effect) is thus the enemy of empirical freedom; but the block universe is an illusion. Let us not be misled by Napoleon's belief in his "star." Napoleon was a great conqueror and fore-runner of the *Boches*, but he was not a competent authority on metaphysics.

Granting that things are plural and that the will is determined by causes, it may seem that this last fact involves a discrediting and annulment of empirical freedom as much as if the universe were One. Again a speculative *conviction* threatens to eclipse and modify empirical *fact*. For if at some past date I could have surveyed all the elements of my nature and foreseen all the coming impacts of circumstance upon it, I could have predicted with certainty my present volition. Thus, we incline to say, I am in the passive grip of the past and not my own master. Let us ask, in the first place, whether, when the time comes, I shall remember my prediction with its data and the sense of rigid determination it involved. For this would

indeed be a paralyzing thought. The answer must be in the negative. For if, when the time comes, to all the determining elements I foresaw, the knowledge of their determination were added, a new element would enter into my act, and I should not have foreseen correctly. Hence, it belongs to the requirements of the supposed case that the eventual act should be naïve and unself-conscious. You can not know about your acting, at the time when you act, without your action becoming a different one. But, in that case, we are rid in strictness of analysis of the paralyzing thought! In the second place, and still more important: when we come to act, those antecedent causes—the elements of our nature and the impacts of circumstance—are no longer real, and all that is real and operative is our *present* nature; in short, our will. This it is, and this alone, which will determine our act. How then is our will powerless, or vitiated by its connection with the past? Would we have our will different—is not what we will . . . what we will? Do we accuse the past for making us will what we actually will? Could we have our will undetermined, how should we wish it to be different? And if we should not wish it to be different, what disadvantage is it that it is determined?

To sum up: the will, though determined by the past, is (1) alone now real and efficacious, and it is (2) just what we wish it to be. What possible blot does its determination then cast upon our empirical freedom?

Freedom having thus been delivered from the clutches both of the past and of the Absolute, the two main illusions have been pricked that make men fatalists. The self is thereby left in a singularly able and responsible position. How responsible, will be seen if we consider the bearing of the foregoing on one of the problems that most exercise the human mind: whether the universe is on the side of the Good, that is, of what we human beings fundamentally will. Nature seems indifferent, its general action is like its weather; and, at such a time as the present, we get the feeling that a great part (not the greatest part, thank Heaven!) of the human race is hostile to what we will. In despair of finite help we turn to the Nature of Things (which we distinguish from Nature!) and say to ourselves that we must perforce assume it to be on the side of the Good. But we should perhaps do well to remember (1) that the world would be a tolerably satisfactory place to live in if it were not for human beings; (2) that a majority of these presumably have the same fundamental will which we find in ourselves, and, even if not, could probably be brought to see that good (*i. e.*, cooperation) is more profitable than evil (*i. e.*, warlike and other competition); (3) that it may well be that, since the predominance of good is so

important to us, and since we are empirically free, it has been left to us to secure its predominance by our own efforts. We should be ill-advised, in our half-hearted and questioning way, to trust to an abstract tendency toward good in the universe if we ourselves neglect to exemplify it. The best universe for human beings would perhaps be one in which it was left to them to work out their own salvation.

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## THE PHILOSOPHY OF LOYALTY

I PROPOSE to look briefly at certain aspects of the attempt by Professor Royce to restate ethical theory in terms of loyalty as the supreme ethical ideal and end. The book has had a considerable influence, at least with the layman, and very likely is destined to have more. Of course, in Professor Royce's own mind it stood as a corroboration of his own favorite brand of metaphysics; but except in an indirect way it is not as metaphysics that I wish to approach it. Many of Professor Royce's readers who have had no inclination to adopt his idealism and absolutism have doubtless felt the persuasiveness of his ethical teaching; and it is as ethics that I am interested in it here.

Now loyalty has some pronounced advantages over the formulas that have been most prominent in the past. It carries with it an objectivity, a bigness, a sense of worth-whileness, with which a more self-centered ideal does not find it easy to compete. Set it alongside a pleasure theory of the good, and its emotional superiority is at once manifest; and it maintains in a measure the same advantage over the subtler end of self-realization. There is a freshness, a disinterestedness, an absence of the petty and the merely personal about "devotion to a cause," which makes a strong natural appeal to our admiration and approval, provided we can get men in a mood where self-interest does not distort their sense of natural values.

But such considerations do not cover the entire field of popular ethical opinion, or reign supreme even in disinterested reflection; there are also natural doubts that arise about the claims of loyalty. So, for example, the greater the insistence that any plan of life comes not from within, but from social patterns already in existence, the more the dangers of "conformity" rise into view. Professor Royce does not ignore this wholly; but his rejoinder seems to miss in an important respect the point of the charge. We avoid the evils of conformity, he says, by throwing ourselves with enthusiasm into the